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Debate Paper #1

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Does comedy news enhance political and environmental literacy?

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The argument of whether comedy news can enhance political and environmental literacy is a constant and current battle between news shows (Fox News and CNN) and comedy news shows (Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert). The argument revolves around the discussion of whether comedy news is actually enhancing the public's knowledge or it is simply comedy. News shows see Stewart and Colbert as doing whatever they can to get a laugh, while the comedians only claim to be showing passion for these politics in a truthful yet entertaining way. Both parties' intention is to relay the information and the actions of officials and politicians to the general public, but the way this information is passed on is left to each party's discretion. Congress men and women are huge stakeholders in starting the process of making decisions that are intended to benefit the country. The responsibility is then transferred to the media in conveying this information to the citizens in a truthful and informational manner. There is additional responsibility on the citizens to do some of their own inferring and not to take everything the media says at face value. All parts of this network of information transfer have equal responsibility in passing along imperative information in order to keep everyone well informed.

In "America Is a Joke", Chris Smith argues that The Daily Show has become an integral part of the government as it is a form of "postmodern entertainment but with a political purpose." Presently, American politicians all seem much more like scripted actors created by these cable producers at Fox News, manipulating the actions of these officials as a way of capturing more viewers. Jon Stewart attempts to correct these misguidings by providing a truthful report through the exploitation of these news stations. This however is believed to be just simply a comedic attack on the seriousness of these stations as stated by Glenn Beck, "He takes things out of context (no worse than most of the other

mainstream media) and is more interested in being funny than trying to actually understand the key messages in [my] show.” This type of response common amongst those Stewart targets is often rebutted with the argument that behind every joke is a well thought out message. Not only is Stewart providing entertainment, but he is also providing raw information not based on who is in the White House but based on what is happening in our nation. He states, “We felt like, we’re serious people doing an unserious thing, and they’re unserious people doing a very serious thing.” Stewart’s passion for moral and editorial authority shows through his performances as he’s appalled at the seemingly lack of feelings of the media. They show more interest in facts than feelings and lack the motivation to demand truth and good in the government.

This is an interesting article as it portrays Jon Stewart as someone who cares about telling the truth by exploiting the leaders of our nation to the public. The article claims that politicians seem much more like scripted actors based on the way cable producers at Fox portray them, but at the same time, Jon Stewart treats Fox News and the politicians in the same way. By drawing attention to a common remark while making a disappointed face, a viewer is automatically programed to believe the actual news stations are making uneducated points just by this forced reaction. Additionally, it is claimed that Stewart has well thought out jokes, when many of the jokes and visual aids used on his show are improvised less than an hour before airing. Many of his jokes are also based on a group of people watching Fox News in hopes of finding something to exploit. At times this can seem a lot like grasping at straws.

Matt Welch, in “The “Jon Stewart Game”: Everyone Loses, Except Him!” exploits the fact that many of the viewers and attendants at Stewart’s Rally to Restore Sanity are relatively illiterate when the topic of politics is brought up. He shows that Stewart’s main game is to make jokes for the purpose of comedy. It is pointed out that Stewart claims to have outgrown comedy and no longer considers himself a comedian but is reluctant to say what he actually “is”. This portrayal of Stewart’s noncommittal role in

our political/ media structure provides a questionable motive of what his true goals are. In the video of interviewing citizens at his rally, the role did not seem to be that of an informative party. Citizens were unable to answer/ form simple opinions on questions asked by the interviewer. When asked what needed to be done to restore sanity, the women used the simple answer of “Everything” giving no true knowledge of the central theme of the rally she was at. When asked what they were hoping to get out of the rally, citizens stated “Some nonsense”, showing no true interest in any of the political issues occurring.

This article about Jon Stewart’s fan’s being uneducated was mainly proven in the short video of interviews at the Rally to Restore Sanity. While the responses of all of the interviewees were disappointing and lacked any knowledge of national problems or political relevance, it is easy to pick out and skew the results. How many people were actually interviewed and how many people’s interviews were not used because of their educated answers? It is easy to pick enough uneducated people to compile a video of 5 minutes out of a rally with thousands of people attending. Additionally, the article points out the fact that Stewart doesn’t claim a comedic role, but the very existence of The Daily Show relies on the satirical outlook of Fox News and Politics.

In Tom Junod’s strip down of Jon Stewart, Jon Stewart and the Burden of History, he picks apart Stewart’s career in an attempt to rationalize his intentions and behaviors on The Daily Show. Stewart’s main audience are young college kids whose only source of political news is The Daily Show. This doesn’t create a very well rounded perspective as the views from just this show are only Stewart’s satirical point of view. He is primarily focused on creating a comedic environment in order to provide an “out” to his viewers from the controversial world of politics. Stewart is constantly denying the power that he has over the American population while he consistently has millions of viewers four nights a week, and by protesting his role as a comedian “he’s not escaping from the collective fantasy. He’s feeding it. The collective fantasy, you see, is not just about Jon Stewart, it’s about America, especially liberal America,

and its need for redeemers to rise out of its ranks.” Stewart takes advantage of his likable façade in order to portray his targets the “the dicks” in his show, while he’s really bullying in a self-righteous demeanor. Stewart “strives for decency” and after targeting Sanchez (a news reporter who was fired due to his reaction) he states that Sanchez was a victim of the media rather than himself, but in actuality, Rick Sanchez was destroyed by Jon Stewart when he lost his job and career. Stewart’s misguided claims of not being a comedian are confusing as his satirical view on Fox News is the only reason Stewart exists, and while he claims to have no political power, his position “presiding over the biggest celebration of political powerlessness in American history” would prove otherwise from the Rally to Restore Sanity.

After reading these three articles, one affirmative and two negative, I’ve come to the conclusion that comedy news is enhancing political and environmental literacy. While I disagree with the fact that Jon Stewart is a comedian, I do believe that he has a large political role and that’s to keep the public informed just like any other form of media. The manner in which he does so, to his discretion, is through a satirical news show. At the same time, he is exploiting all of the irresponsible decisions officials are making in a manner that is more truthful and to the point than Fox News or any other news station. He shows this by primarily targeting serious news stations. It’s through this action and his form of information networking which makes him a comedian who’s just as responsible for the literacy of the public as any other news show.

"America Is a Joke." *NYMag.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Oct. 2014.

"The "Jon Stewart Game": Everyone Loses, Except Him!" *Reason.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Oct. 2014.

"Jon Stewart and the Burden of History." *Print*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Oct. 2014.

